

# Walpurgisnacht Tour

**Self-guided itinerary of “Walpurgisnacht”-related and haunted sites in northeastern Berks County.**

**We invite you to *haunted sites* from Crystal Cave to Hawk Mountain: Approximately 24 miles, 58 minutes travel time...through some of the loveliest–and most haunted–countryside in the region!**



Berks County is home to one of the last vestiges of an ancient observance that was brought to our hills and valleys by the earliest settlers. It is Walpurgisnacht, which is still celebrated in parts of Eastern Europe and Scandinavia today.

The epicenter of Berks' Walpurgisnacht tradition is "Witches' Hill," an otherwise unremarkable ridge in the beautiful northern farming region. Several haunted sites can be found within a short drive of one another in that area.

Walpurgisnacht's roots can be found in pre-Christian Frühjahrsfests. Walpurgisnacht is situated directly opposite Halloween and is the end marker in the seasonal cycle, which begins with Candlemas/Groundhog Day. Children play pranks on unsuspecting victims around midnight on April 30, similar to Halloween, and some even dress up as witches and evil spirits.

The Brocken, the highest peak in the Harz Mountains, is known as the mythical meeting place of the witches. Witches' fires may burn in some places. Since noise was deemed the most effective way to drive off evil spirits many ways of making noise are known. On May Day earth spirits like fairies and elves (the ancient dead) would come out of the hills and barrows to dance on May Eve and well into the summer.

**\*Starting Point:**

Crystal Cave parking lot  
Left on Crystal Cave Road  
Left on Dunkel's Church Road  
Right on Route 143  
Left on Virginville Road  
Right on Witchcraft Road

**Look for Witches' Hill:**

**\*At the highest crest of the ridge along Witchcraft Road is "Witches' Hill," or, as the Pennsylvania Germans call it, "Hexe Baerrick" or "Hexe Dans." It is the epicenter of the earliest Walpurgisnacht observances that date to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This is where the earliest settlers gathered on April 30 to scare away the witches, ghosts, and demons they believed dwelled here. It was said that no crops grew on this spot because the evil ones would tramp the fields in their ranting revelries. It was also said that horses refused to trot over this ridge because of the ominous spirits that would rear up before them and scare them. It is one of the last vestiges of the European "Walpurgisnacht" traditions in the United States. A similar site is "Hexenkopf," in Northampton County.**

**Headless Horseman:**

Continue west on Witchcraft Road  
Right on Haas Road  
Right on Balthaser Road  
Left on Route 143  
Right on Covered Bridge Road

**\*The ghost of a headless man is said to stumble through the Dreibelbis covered bridge. He was decapitated in a sleigh accident in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Misty forms and thumping sounds inside the bridge mark his arrival.**

**The Fiery Dragon:**

Left on Dreibelbis Station Road  
Left on Old Route 22  
Right on Route 143  
Left on Mountain Road  
Right on Blue Rocks Road  
Right on Sousley Road

**\*Legends abound on and around the 15-acre boulder field known as Blue Rocks. On the main access road, the ghost of a Revolutionary War-era soldier has been reported, and eerie glowing forms have been reported along the southern edge of the rocks. The fiery dragon said to soar between Dragon Cave and the Pinnacle is said to fly over the rocks on dark and stormy nights. NOTE: The Blue Rocks, a The Blue Rocks Campground is private property, and a fee may be charged to enter. Inquire at the office.**

**Hawk Mountain Ghosts:**

From Blue Rocks parking lot  
Take Sousley Road to Route 143  
Right on Route 143  
Left on Hawk Mountain Road  
Right on New Bethel Church Road

**\*The architecturally stunning New Bethel Church is the final resting place of the Hawk Mountain murderer, Matthias Schaumboch, or Schambacher. Some say he really doesn't "rest" there, as many folks have seen his ghost gliding through the**

**graveyard by day or *night*. His remains lie in an unmarked grave—the tombstone was stolen several years ago.**

From New Bethel Church parking lot  
Left on New Bethel Church Road  
Right on Hawk Mountain Road

**\*Just before the top of the hill is a small white house. It stands on the site of the cabin of the Gerhart family, which was burned to the ground with the family inside during the French & Indian War. One boy escaped and lived to tell the horrid tale. More than a century later, the present structure was built there and occupied by Matthias Schaumboch (or, as his missing tombstone spelled it “Schambacher”). He offered passing teamsters refreshments out of his house, known in history as “Schaumboch’s Tavern.” But, he is also said to have killed as many as 14 men on this site. Their ghosts swirl eternally there, making Hawk Mountain one of the most intensely haunted spots in the state.**

This concludes the Crystal Cave-to-Hawk Mountain itinerary. To return to Berks County from Hawk Mountain, follow Hawk Mountain Road north to Route 895, turn left to Route 61; or follow Hawk Mountain Road south to Route 143. Or, take some roads never taken and find some incredible scenery in this “eck,” or corner of Berks County. If you get lost, just stop and ask for directions. The natives are friendly! The ghosts? Not always that friendly!